**Introduction**

The purpose of this project is to explore 19th Century Classical Liberalism. 19th Century liberals were men of the bourgeois, who disdained the aristocracy but who looked down on the property-less working class. They advocated for the principles of the French Revolution but abhorred the violence that followed after 1789. They believed in Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and the principles of the Rights of Man and the Citizen proclaimed in August of 1789 and believed in the principle of property as the source of responsible judgment and solid citizenship. But they had many diverse ideas and differed in the Great Britain; the Germanies; and France. (Davies, Norman. Europe, A History. pg 802)

The Revolutions of 1848 were the Liberals attempt to achieve their political goals of constitutional monarchies but failed in Prussia, Austria and France because of the forces of reaction and conservatism that retook power after the collapse of the 1848 Revolutions.

The term Liberal comes from the Spanish word *liberales,* who drew up their Constitution of 1812 in opposition to the absolutist Spanish monarchy. But liberal ideas came from the Enlightenment as the French Revolution of 1789. (Davies, Norman. Europe, A History. pg 802)

Liberalism can be divided into: Social Liberalism; Economic Liberalism; and Political Liberalism.

Social Liberalism viewed society in terms of freedom of individual choice and opportunities for growth. Each individual succeeded through their own efforts and if they failed it was because of some inherent weakness and deserved no charity.

Economic Liberalism that stressed Laissez faire and believed in no governmental interference in the market and no trade barriers or worker’s unions, as David Ricardo expounded about economic laws and the “iron law of wages”.

Political liberalism worked for constitutional and representative institutions; freedom of assembly and the press (no censorship). But they did not necessarily favor democracy since only men of property, wisdom and education had sufficient political judgment. Liberals believed in the ideas of John Locke. They believed these political ideas would benefit all individuals and provide the opportunity for advancement. (Chambers, Mortimer et. al The Western Experience (Ninth Edition) Pg 677-678)

We start with Great Britain, the outstanding exception to the continent, where liberalism flourished for most of the 19th Century.

**Liberalism in Great Britain**

The liberal movement started in the 1870’s in Great Britain. It was a political, social, and economic movement that began here sooner than anywhere else, and was sought to be more successful here than anywhere in continental Europe. Once known as the Whig Party, it transformed into the Liberal Party. This movement was heavily influenced by John Locke, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill. During this time the British government passed legislation to introduce compulsory primary school education, reduce working hours within industries, as well as introducing the first safety standards for factories. These were small steps towards greater levels of state intervention in social and economic matters. (Suite101, Encyclopedia Britannica)

**Economic Liberalism**

As noted early, Great Britain was thought to be the model of liberalism. David Ricardo and Adam Smith were two of this time periods’ founding members of philosophies on economic prosperity. David Ricardo (1772-1823), an English political economist, wrote in his book *Principles of Political Economy* (1817)that liberalism was the keystone of modern economics. He also believed that the wealth of the community comes from land, capital and labor, and that these “classes” are compensated by rent, profit, and wages. He believed that a product’s value results in the labor needed to make it. This was known as the labor theory of value. Ricardo’s views are comparable with those of John Locke and Adam Smith.

Adam Smith (1723-1790), also a philosopher of this time, wrote *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), a book discussing and encouraging a free market economy. Both Smith and Ricardo believed that the market should be free of regulation and restrictions. They also believed that the state should not regulate production or trade. They believed that for a state to achieve economic growth, politicians must adopt some of the efficiency and energy of the men of action who transformed the economy (Chamber et al 2007, 678).

**Utilitarianism**

Utilitarianism is defined as the idea that the [moral worth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality) of an action is determined solely by its contribution to overall [utility](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utility): that is, its contribution to happiness or pleasure as summed among all people. The idea of utilitarianism was most recognized by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), an English jurist, philosopher, legal and social reformer. Bentham “believed he could rationally deduce practical programs from universal principles.” He criticized the legal system and was an opponent of the precedent-bound courts of England. Unlike other philosophers of his time, Bentham rejected the *Doctrine of Natural Rights* and instead believed that utility, which was measured by “the greatest good for the greatest number”, would replace natural rights. Also unlike other philosophers, who believed in a limited government, Bentham believed in a central role for government. He believed that people should be rewarded for the good actions they commit, and should be penalized for the undesirable actions they commit. John Stuart Mill states, in his book *Utilitarianism*, “…pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain (Mill 1906, 10).” Bentham did however believe in economic freedom, separation of church and state, freedom of expression, equal rights for women, and the end of slavery among other things.

Bentham’s followers called themselves “philosophic radicals” and while they didn’t always adopt all of his beliefs, they did always apply his principles. By his death in 1832, they were among the most important reformers of Parliament, law, prisons, education, and welfare. They pushed for “humane reforms on grounds of common sense and natural harmony (Chambers et al 2007, 678).”

**John Stuart Mill**

John Stuart Mill was thought to be the most important liberal thinker of the nineteenth century. Raised under strict utilitarianism and a student of Bentham’s, Mill was a philosopher, an economist, and a publicist. Mill was seen to have written some of the most influential classics of modern thought. Mill was fearful of the intolerance and oppression and believed that freedom of thought was the first principle. He favored an open administration, organized interest groups, and workers’ cooperatives. Mill also believed in a strong distinction between production and distribution.

Mill is famous for several well known writings including *On Liberty* (1859), which was one of the most important works in European political theory. *On Liberty* is a “balanced, yet unyielding declaration that society can have no higher interest that the freedom of each of its members.” Mill believed that rulers should have limits on their powers and that people have a right to have a say in government’s decisions (Chambers 2007, 679). He believed that social liberty was “the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual.” It was attempted in two ways: first, by obtaining recognition of certain immunities, called political liberties or rights; second, by establishment of a system of "constitutional checks ". Mill believed however that limiting government’s power was simply not enough. He goes on to say:   
 “Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself.”

What Mill means, is that man must control his own destiny. He also states that, "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign (Mill 2002, 3).”

John Stuart Mill was also an advocate for universal suffrage. He favored woman’s rights and equality. In 1851 Mill married Harriet Taylor, a fellow woman’s activist who shared similar, but more radical views on women’s equality. Taylor was an enormous influence on the works of Mill and was seen to be his inspiration. In 1851 Taylor published *The Enfranchisement of Women*, and in 1869, upon Taylor’s death, Mill published *The Subjection of Women*. While Taylor’s arguments were a bit more radical, they both shared similar points. Mill’s work states that, “…the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself…(Mill 1989, 119)” and Taylor writes, “…The real question is, whether it is right and expedient that one-half of the human race should pass through life in a state of forced subordination to the other half (Mill 1851, 13). Both quotes directly refer to women being subordinates of men. While they shared similarities, they also had a few opposing viewpoints. Mill believed that a woman’s place was in the home, to take care of the chores and to look after the children. Taylor on the other hand believed that women have every right to work outside of the home just like the men do.

**William Gladstone**

William Gladstone (1809-1898), a British statesman, was a four time Liberal Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1868–74, 1880–85, 1886 and 1892–94). Gladstone was commonly referred to as “The People’s William” or the “Grand Old Man (G.O.M)”. Gladstone was most notably known for his work in transforming the Whig party to the Liberal party. Gladstone is also known for his rivalry with conservative Tory party leader, Benjamin Disraeli. While they never had any fights, they did have very strong opposing viewpoints. Disraeli was known to refer to Gladstone as “God’s One Mistake.”

William Gladstone also had a strong influence on reform in his time. In his first year as Prime Minister, his government created the first national elementary program along with reforms in the justice system and civil service. Gladstone is famous for stating “Liberalism is trust of the people tempered by prudence. Conservatism is distrust of the people tempered by fear (The BBC).”

**German Liberalism**

Liberalism as a political movement began in the Germanies in 1815 when the people started to push for a constitution to safeguard their rights from the as well as allow them to participate in the state. This would lead one to think that they were pushing for a new form of government entirely which is not the case; the liberals in the German confederation wanted a constitutional monarchy which would leave their existing monarchies in place. The people were skeptical of completely giving up their traditional form of government so they compromised by leaving the monarchies in place and just limiting their powers through the guarantees of freedom for citizens given by the constitution. The constitution would provide them with liberty by ensuring the individuals rights and freedoms were protected against the state as well as provide them with citizenship by allowing them to participate in the state (Langewiesche 2000). This participation, or suffrage, would not however be granted to everyone, only male property owners, leaving women, minorities, and the landless population out since they were not considered independent enough in their thoughts and opinions to participate (Sheehan 1993).

When looking at early liberalism in the Germanies it is essential to address August Ludwig von Schlözer who was considered the forefather of German liberalism in that his views and ideals became those of the future liberal movement. Ludwig von Schlözer wanted the rule of law to be applied to all people within the state including the Monarchs to assure citizens retained their original human rights. This was adopted by later liberals who, as was stated before, wanted to keep the monarchy in place but have their powers be limited by the constitution or rule of law. Schlözer saw reform, not revolution, as the path to make this reality which was the sentiment of the later liberals who watched the French Revolution fail and did not want a repeat of that in their countries. Schlözer also called for legal equality while at the same time accepting the theory that some inequalities in class rank and economic circumstances were due to the differences in ability and talent. In his opinion if everyone was given an equal opportunity to succeed then those who did not could blame no one but themselves. This theory held over to the later liberals who were against privilege yet in favor of property rights because to them those who were successful enough to obtain property were entitled to keep it (Langewiesche 2000).

A question to address in the early liberals motivations is why liberalism was pushed so strongly within the Germanies. This is answered by examining the Karlsbad Decrees of 1819 which were a set of decrees meant to keep the political public, or those in office, from spouting left-wing, or liberal, ideals. Those civil servants with liberal leanings had to either change their opinions to match that of the government or risk being fired and black balled from other jobs, jail time, or worse. The decrees called for a closer supervision of universities to be sure that teachers were not teaching the liberal views that could potentially be harmful to the state (Sheehan 1993). The press was also monitored and censored to ensure they stayed favorable to the government which to the liberals was one of the worst parts of the decrees because they say free press as a way for individuals to participate in politics and to uniting Germany (Langewiesche 2000). There was also a federal bureau set up by the decrees to help contain the revolutionary agitation by the liberals. These decrees were meant to suppress the liberal movement but it actually had the opposite effect, the liberals were spurred on and enraged by the decrees and responded with more agitation and a stronger push for liberalization (Sheehan 1993).

The early liberals of the Germanies not only wanted the freedoms and participation involved in the liberalization process, they also liked the idea of nationalism that liberalism sported. The Germanies were divided into individual states with different governments, economies, and social spheres which prevented them from emerging as a strong political or economic leader within the European states. The thought of nationalization was vital to the liberal movement gaining support in the early 1840’s. Many people wanted to unite the Germanies under a common culture and sense of identity which the liberalists connected to their movement and were able to gain many national supporters to their cause (Langewiesche 2000). Although the Germanies wanted to emerge as a more economically powerful and stable state they did not want to liberalize their economies.

In the early years of liberalism economic liberalism did not go hand in hand with political liberalism in the Germanies. The German liberals did not agree with the policy of free economy that Adam Smith advocated for and that England eventually adopted, they saw a free market as a war of everyone against everyone with no one actually benefiting. Instead of unlimited competition the early liberals called for free access to guilds with some laws in place to govern trade and industry to ensure some protections (Langewiesche 2000)

There was a revolutionary in the Germanies by the liberals to try and change the traditional political structure and impose a constitution to ensure their freedoms. This revolution and its failure will be talked about more in depth later in the paper, this section will talk about the after effects of the revolution. After the failure of the liberal revolution of 1848 and 1849 there followed a decade of reaction within the Germanies that lasted from 1849 to 1859 in which the liberals were suppressed and the monarchs began to try and reassert their powers. There was a sense of Realpolitick or political reality among the German liberals, Ludwig August von Rochau sums up this feeling after he wrote the book Grundsätze der Realpolitik in1853 when he said, “The castles that they built in the air have evaporated, the defenceless rights, whose theoretical recognition they achieved, have no more than an apparent effect on practice (Sheehan 1993).” This quote follows the felling of the liberals after the failed revolution in that they realized that what the ambitions of the past generation were not all together realistic; they built up an illusionary government that did not and could not really exist and in the end there was not much left (Sheehan 1993). The German people finally just accepted the existing government instead of trying to change it for the better.

This was true for most although realpolitik meant something a little different to Julius Hölder who in 1855 began a new campaign for change when he united the democratic and the liberal parties. The two parties joined together after many years of considering each other enemies in a parliamentary party in order to resist the government’s plans to revise the municipal organization that had been liberalized in 1849. To Julius Hölder Realpolitik was not sacrificing all liberal values but also not pushing for unrealistic changes in the government. The party wanted to cooperate with the government as much as possible while continuing to push for some reforms they saw as necessary such as keeping things like the Basic Rights from repeal. The Basic Rights repeal by the Chamber of Deputies in 1852 was actually one of the main factors leading to the parties joining forces.

The liberals were not the only ones to compromise after the revolution, the governments and monarchies also began to realize that compromise and some cooperation was the best policy to ensure peace and unity. This is seen in the words of King Maximilian II of Bavaria in 1859, “I want peace with my people and with me Chambers.” This was in regard to the strife present within his Chambers of Deputies as well as among his citizens. In order to achieve this he granted legal emancipation to the Jews, enacted a new commercial law, and reformed the judicial system. The area in which there was the most compromise was that of national unity, this was one thing that the liberals and many monarchs agreed on (Langewiesche 2000).

**Liberalism in Baden**

There was one successful liberal state within the Germanies that served as a kind of model of liberalism for other German states for a time and that was Baden. They decentralized the block of state administration and created new district councils to enforce local self-government. The state fulfilled one of the main ideals of the German liberals in 1864 when justice reforms turned it into a state founded on the rule of law. Another liberal goal was to have separation of the justice and administration which was also adapted in Baden in 1864 through the reforms. There was also occupational freedom and freedom of movement and marriage. Additionally the Badenese liberalism followed the liberal ideals when it came to economic policies; there was not a call for full freedom of trade but instead a cautious reform of the existing guild system. Baden’s liberal government, run by the Lamey-Roggenbach cabinet, collapsed in 1865 when Roggenbach’s national policies failed and he was forced to accept those of Bismark.

Despite the fact that liberalism did not take a strong hold within the states of Germany during the 19th century they still left their mark and continued to be active in the political realm for years to come. The National Liberal Party continued to run candidates in German elections and won more seats than any other party between 1871 and 1879 under the leadership of Rudolf von Benningsen and Johannes von Miquel (National Liberal Party 2009).

Langewiesche, Dieter. *Liberalism in Germany.* Princton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000.

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